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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 000803

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TAGS: PREL KWBG IS SETTLEMENTS ISRAELI PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS GAZA DISENGAGEMENT

SUBJECT: DEFENSE MINISTRY DENIES VERACITY OF FEB 8 HA'ARETZ

ARTICLE ON ILLEGAL OUTPOSTS

Classified By: DCM Gene A. Cretz for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (U) A February 8 article in Ha'aretz quotes a senior security official as saying that Israel will evacuate illegal outposts in the West Bank only after the implementation of the disengagement plan in the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank. According to the security official, the GOI's commitment to the U.S. to evacuate outposts remains in place, but attempts to evacuate the outposts now would inflame the conflict between the settlers and the government, and could hurt the implementation of the disengagement plan. The official also predicted that Washington would not press Israel on the issue of outpost removals, noting that Secretary Rice did not mention outposts during her meetings

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with GOI officials on February 6-7. The article said that although the Secretary stressed that evacuating outposts was important at her final press conference, she "clearly placed higher priority on implementation of disengagement."

2. (C) Brigadier General (res.) Baruch Spiegel told the Ambassador that the article is incorrect and that they do not know who the senior security official is who is quoted in the article. The Minister of Defense asked Spiegel to convey to the Ambassador confirmation that there is no change in Israel's policy with respect to taking down outposts.

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